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Agriculture expected to come

Wednesday, Kern County farmers and residents will be able to voice their opinions on proposed solutions to at least some of California's water problems through the CALFED Bay-Delta program. Local water officials are advising agriculture to make one message loud and clear: A passive approach to solving water problems through water conservation and/or land fallowing won't fix anything.

"We have to do something in the Delta, we have to do something about water supplies," says Lloyd Fryer, policy and administration manager for the Kern County Water Agency.

CALFED is a group of 15 state and federal agencies involved in water regulation and management in the



Beth Brookhart

Agriculture columnist

San Francisco Bay-Sacramento/San Joaquin River Bay Delta area. Local water officials and representatives from the agency have been deeply involved in the CALFED process. The group was formed to plan a solution to Delta water issues related to ecosystem quality, water supply reliability, water quality and Delta levee and channel integrity.

A hearing is scheduled for 6 p.m.

Wednesday at the Kern Agricultural Pavilion, 501 S. Mount Vernon Ave. for public comments and local farmers are urged to attend.

Agricultural, environmental and urban water interests have been intensively involved in the CALFED process, which has resulted in the release of a draft environmental impact statement (EIS). The EIS forth three basic alternatives for solving the Delta situation, with variables figured into each of the three alternatives.

The first alternative is to use existing Delta levee systems and levee programs. The second is on modification of levees to serve water development programs and implement.

out swinging at CALFED

facilities, including widening channels to move greater amounts of water through the Delta. The third alternative proposes a new conveyance system from the Delta. All three alternatives have advantages and disadvantages and water officials are urging farmers to take a thorough look at all proposals.

Kern County Water Agency officials have been scrutinizing the CALFED program and have been working closely with urban water groups in order to develop a mutually beneficial program, said Fryer. While he does not expect KCWA to make a specific recommendation for adoption of any of the alternatives, he believes the ag-urban coalition will stand firm on finding a preferred solu-

tion for the entire group.

"We want to be able to tell CALFED that whatever the preferred alternative is, here is what we want it to look like in order for us to buy on to this," he said.

Fryer said the agricultural community needs to "show up in droves" for the CALFED hearing to make sure agricultural interests give a loud voice on key components. Specifically, Fryer said agriculture needs to make it clear that demand management provisions incorporated into alternative ones, such as land fallowing and unrealistic conservation measures imposed on agriculture "will not cut the mustard."

"CALFED has numbers like four million acre feet of reduced applied

water demand through water conservation, premised on distribution uniformities (from agriculture) of 90 percent. That's ridiculous," he said.

He said he wants farmers to tell CALFED officials that "In the real world, we're already about as efficient as we can get."

He hopes farmers will express outrage over the CALFED option of fallowing half a million acres of land, he said.

"They're saying 'let's just retire your (farming) industry and that will take care of this.' Maybe we should retire the winter run salmon," Fryer said.

Local water districts are expected to send strong representation to the

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hearings. Fryer said farmers need to become deeply involved in the CALFED process so the opportunity to solve the state's water dilemma is not lost.

"If nothing is done then what we're faced with when this accord goes away is increased listing of endangered species, increased limits on pumping for export projects which translates into decreased supplies for agriculture," he said.

"If we don't do something here we'll go back to the games of fights and wars between us and environmentalists and the fish and wildlife agencies," he said.

Gene Lundquist, KCWA board member, echoed Fryer's concerns and said he hopes for a positive solution to the Baby-Delta problems. Lundquist said the coordinated approach used in the CALFED process of agriculture, with urban and environmental groups working together, has been a shot in the arm for California's water woes.

He said he hopes all parties remain at the table through these hearings. Lundquist said he was slightly disconcerted when some environmental groups criticized the draft EIS when it was released.

He is also concerned about the pro-

posed alternative for retiring land in the San Joaquin Valley for conservation purposes. That idea won't fly with agriculture, Lundquist said.

"That would devastate the ag community and then all down the line it would effect associate industries," he said.

After the comment period is over in June, Fryer said CALFED will publish a preferred alternative. Eventually a legislative measure may be necessary to fund a project, if CALFED chooses that option.